Trump says Xi knows 'consequences' if China invades Taiwan

WEST BEACH: President Donald Trump said Xi Jinping understands the consequences if China invades Taiwan, while refusing to specifically say the United States would defend the island, according to an extract of a CBS News interview broadcast on Sunday.

Trump said Taiwan "never even came up as a subject" when he met the Chinese president in South Korea on Thursday for their first face-to-face meeting in six years.

Asked on CBS's "60 Minutes" whether he would order US forces into action if China moved militarily on Taiwan, Trump said: "You'll find out if it happens, and he understands the answer to that." But Trump declined to spell out what he meant in the interview conducted Friday at his Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida, adding: "I can't give away my secrets. The other side knows."

The US president claimed that Xi and those close to him had "openly said" that "'we would never do anything while President Trump is president,' because they know the consequences." China claims self-governing Taiwan as its territory. Under longstanding policy, the United States recognises only Beijing but provides weapons for the island's self-defence.

The issue continues to provoke tensions, which Trump and Xi appeared to have avoided at their summit, focusing instead on easing the trade war between Washington and Beijing.

Military channels

US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth said on Saturday that during talks with his Chinese counterpart, the two sides had agreed to reboot military-to-military links to "deconflict and deescalate".

Hegseth met with China's Defence Minister Dong Jun on the sidelines of a regional summit in Malaysia, a day after leaders Xi Jinping and Donald Trump held talks in South Korea.

"I just spoke to President Trump, and we agree — the relationship between the United States and China has never been better," Hegseth said in a post on X, adding that he had spoken with Dong again since their face-to-face meeting.

"The Admiral and I agree that peace, stability, and good relations are the best path for our two great and strong countries," he said, touting a path of "strength, mutual respect, and positive relations." The Pentagon chief said Dong and he "also agreed that we should set up military-to-military channels to deconflict and deescalate any problems that arise." Such channels have existed for years but at times fallen out of use.

"We have more meetings on that coming soon," Hegseth said without elaborating.

There was no immediate comment from Beijing. According to a Chinese defence ministry readout of their meeting in Malaysia, Dong had told Hegseth the countries should "strengthen policy-level dialogue to enhance trust and dispel uncertainty", and build a bilateral military relationship "characterised by equality, respect, peaceful coexistence and stable positive momentum."

Hegseth warned earlier this year that China was "credibly preparing" to use military force to upend the balance of power in Asia, remarks that drew a sharp rebuke from Beijing.

China claims almost all of the South China Sea, despite overlapping claims with its neighbors — including close allies of Washington.

Tensions have also flared occasionally around Taiwan, which Beijing insists is part of its territory and opposes any official exchanges with it.

A 2022 visit to Taiwan by then US House speaker Nancy Pelosi prompted China to launch military drills around the self-ruled island.—AFP

Andrew to lose his last military rank: minister

LONDON: The UK government said on Sunday it would move to strip the former prince Andrew of his honorary title of vice-admiral, his last remaining military rank. Andrew was stripped of his honorary military titles by his mother, the late Queen Elizabeth II, in 2022 after he was sued by Virginia Giuffre, US sex offender Jeffrey Epstein's main accuser.

The latest move comes after King Charles III on Thursday removed all his younger brother's remaining royal titles and honours amid growing UK anger over Andrew's ties to Epstein.

"We've seen Andrew surrender the honorary positions he's had throughout the military... Guided again by the king, we are working now to remove that last remaining title of vice-admiral that he has," Defence minister John Healey told the *BBC*.

He told the Laura Kuenssberg programme that the government would also be guided by the king on whether Andrew should lose his military medals.

The king's younger brother was once feted for his role as a Royal Navy helicopter pilot in the 1982 Falklands War. He retired in 2001 after 22 years of service.

Andrew has always denied that he sexually abused Giuffre, who said in her posthumous memoir published in October that she was trafficked to have sex with him on three occasions, twice when she was just 17.

But on Thursday Buckingham Palace said in a fiercely-worded statement that "Prince Andrew will now be known as Andrew Mountbatten Windsor" adding "these censures are deemed necessary" despite his denial.

The king and queen also said their "utmost sympathies have been, and will remain with, the victims and survivors of any and all forms of abuse," it added. A friend of the king and Queen Camilla told the Sunday Times: "That was extraordinary. That's the closest you'll get to the king and his court passing judgment on his brother."

UK media reported Andrew had refused to sign off on any statements which referenced the victims since his disastrous *BBCNewsnight* interview in 2019 in which he defended his ties to Epstein and showed no empathy for women involved.—AFP

US strike on 'drug vessel' in Caribbean kills three

WASHINGTON: A US strike on an alleged drug-trafficking vessel in the Caribbean killed three people on Saturday, Pentagon chief Pete Hegseth said, the latest such attack in international waters.

The United States has deployed Navy ships to the Caribbean and sent F-35 stealth warplanes to Puerto Rico, part of a massive military force that Washington insists is aimed at curbing drug trafficking.

More than 15 US strikes on boats in the Caribbean and the Pacific have killed at least 65 people in recent weeks, prompting criticism from governments in the region. The latest strike hit "another narco-trafficking vessel... in the Caribbean," Hegseth wrote on social media.

"This vessel — like EVERY OTHER — was known by our intelligence to be involved in illicit narcotics smuggling," he said. "Three male narco-terrorists were aboard the vessel during the strike, which was conducted in international waters. All three terrorists were killed."

Experts say the attacks, which began in early September, amount to extrajudicial killings even if they target known traffickers, and Washington has yet to make public any evidence that its targets were smuggling narcotics or posed a threat to the United States.—AFP

'Self-rule for Gaza' tops Istanbul moot agenda today

Continued from Page 1

Israel's attacks. It was Turkiye that helped persuade Hamas to accept Trump's peace plan, and Ankara has expressed willingness to take part in the International Stabilisation Force (ISF), proposed to monitor ceasefire implementation in Gaza.

However, Israeli has made it clear that it won't accept the presence of Turkish armed forces in Gaza. Other nations part of troop contribution talks include Jordan, Egypt, Indonesia and Pakistan.

Top-level consultations are said to be underway over the question of sending Pakistani troops for the proposed ISF, and insiders privy to developments say that a formal announcement is expected soon.

However, much like Germany and Jordan, Islamabad would prefer to have any deployment to Gaza under the United Nations umbrella.

On Saturday, the Jordanian and German foreign ministers had called for a UN mandate for the proposed ISF, saying it would "need a clear basis in international law".

Pakistan's stance

During the Istanbul meeting, Pakistan will emphasise the need for the full implementation of the ceasefire agreement and complete Israeli withdrawal from the occupied Palestinian territory, especially Gaza, as well as the provision of unfettered humanitarian assistance to the Palestinians and the reconstruction of Gaza, a statement from the Foreign Office said.

Pakistan has remained engaged with the peace initiative that led to the signing of the Gaza Peace Agreement in Sharm El-Sheikh, the FO said.

"Pakistan will also reiterate the need for collective efforts aimed at achieving an independent, viable, and contiguous State of Palestine, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif [Jerusalem] as its capital, based on pre-1967 borders, in accordance with relevant UN resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative," the FO added.

Pakistan has been, and will continue to be, committed to efforts to restore peace, justice, and dignity to the Palestinian people, as well as to ensure the realisation of their right to self-determination, the statement said.

With input from Reuters

NABATIEH: Women mourn during the funeral of people killed in Israeli strikes in southern Lebanon on Sunday.—Reuters

Obama tells Democrats to push back against Trump's 'recklessness'

NEW YORK: Former President Barack Obama touted Democratic candidates for governor in two states at campaign rallies on Saturday, urging voters in next week's election to reject what he called the lawlessness and recklessness of President Donald Trump's administration.

Obama, the two-term president still highly popular among Democrats, laid out a biting indictment of the Trump administration at rallies for Virginia gubernatorial candidate Abigail Spanberger and New Jersey candidate Mikie Sherrill.

Lets face it, our country and our policy are in a pretty dark place right now, Obama told a roaring crowd of Spanberger supporters at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Virginia.

"Its hard to know where to start." he said, "because every day this White House offers people a fresh batch of lawlessness and recklessness and mean-spiritedness and just plain craziness.

Obama blasted what he called Trumps shambolic tariff policy and deployment of National Guard troops to US cities. He criticised Republicans in Congress for failing to check Trump even when they know hes out of line.

He said he was surprised at how quickly business leaders, law firms and universities opted to bend the knee to appease Trump.

At an event in Newark, New Jersey to support Sherrill, Obama struck many of the same themes as he continued his criticisms of the Trump White House. "Its like every day is Halloween, except its all tricks and no treats, Obama.

The former president occasionally dipped into sarcasm in mentioning Trump decisions such as remodeling parts of the White House even as a federal shutdown continues.

"In fairness he has been focused on some critical issues, like paving over the Rose Garden so folks dont get mud on their shoes, and building a $300 million ballroom," Obama said.

Polls show Spanberger, 46, with a sizable lead over the Republican candidate, Lieutenant Governor Winsome Earle-Sears, 61. Spanberger, a former CIA officer, was a congresswoman for six years.

Most polls show Sherrill with a single-digit lead over Republican Jack Ciatterelli, 63, a former state assemblyman making his third consecutive run for the governors seat.

Republicans in New Jersey have been encouraged in recent years by some statewide races that were closer than expected. Although New Jersey Democrats have a 2-to-1 edge in registered voters, Ciatterelli lost by only three percentage points in the 2021 gubernatorial race, and Donald Trump lost New Jersey by just six points in last year's presidential election.

Powerful figure

Obama, who remains a powerful figure in today's Democratic Party, took the stage to robust applause in Virginia and then New Jersey to stump for two candidates in gubernatorial elections seen as critical bellwethers ahead of the 2026 midterm elections.

The 64-year-old quickly noted how Americans frustrated with rising inflation, energy costs and home prices were "willing to take a chance" on a national candidate like Donald Trump who promised relief from such challenges. But nine months into Trump's second term, "has any of that gotten better?" Obama asked in Norfolk, Virginia as the crowd responded: "No." "Is the economy working better for you? Because it sure has gotten better for Trump and his family," he said.

"For ordinary families, costs haven't gone down, they've gone up — thanks to this shambolic tariff policy," Obama added, refering to the import duties Trump has imposed on various nations.

Four states hold off-year elections on November 4, including New York, where a dramatic mayoral race will determine who runs the country's most populous city.

Until this weekend, Obama had played a relatively subdued role in the campaigning.

On Saturday he stumped for two female gubernatorial hopefuls: former congresswoman Abigail Spanberger in Virginia, and current US House Democrat Mikie Sherrill of New Jersey.

Spanberger holds a roughly nine point lead over her Republican rival, Virginia Lieutenant Governor Winsome Earle-Sears, while Sherrill is locked in a tighter race against businessman Jack Ciattarelli, according to poll averages. "New Jersey, it's time to point America in a better direction," Obama said in Newark.—Agencies

Republicans accused of weaponising hunger

WASHINGTON: A top US congressional Democrat on Sunday accused President Donald Trump and fellow Republicans of choosing to "weaponise hunger," as a prolonged government shutdown disrupts critical food benefits for millions of low-income Americans.

House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries warned that the Republican Party was "unserious" about reopening the government, which has remained shuttered for five weeks, delivering a multi-billion-dollar hit to the economy and leading to sharp accusations from both sides of the political aisle.

He accused Trump's Republicans — many of whom have stayed away from Washington for weeks as the Republican leadership keeps the House of Representatives idle — of manufacturing a crisis, including the lapse of funding for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which provides food aid to more than 42 million Americans.

"We want to reopen the government, we want to enact a bipartisan spending agreement that actually makes life better for everyday Americans," Jeffries told CNN's "State of the Union" talk show.

"It's very unfortunate that Donald Trump and Republicans have decided to weaponise hunger and withhold SNAP benefits, even in contravention of two federal courts which have made clear that not a single person in this country should go without their nutritional assistance."

A federal judge recently ordered the government to use emergency funds to ensure the continuity of SNAP. Trump expressed a willingness to comply but said he needed more clarification on how the administration could legally accomplish that. Jeffries expressed his exasperation over suspending funding for SNAP, which had operated uninterrupted for 60 years until now.

"Donald Trump and his administration (are) finding funding for other projects, but somehow they can't find money to make sure that Americans don't go hungry," he said. Republicans have been seeking a straightforward extension of federal funding through a so-called short-term continuing resolution lasting until November 21, or beyond, to get the lights back on and prompt negotiations over a long-term solution.

But Democrats have balked, demanding that any federal funding plan also include an extension of enhanced Obamacare health insurance subsidies, which are set to expire at year's end absent congressional action.—AFP

Netherlands to return 3,500-year-old sculpture to Egypt

AMSTERDAM: The Netherlands will return a 3,500-year-old sculpture that turned up at a Dutch art fair to Egypt, Prime Minister Dick Schoof said on Sunday during a visit to the country, where he met with President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi.

The artefact in question, which depicts a senior official from the 14791425 BC reign of Pharaoh Thutmose III, is believed to have been stolen and illegally exported, most likely during the unrest of the 2011 Arab Spring, before appearing on the international art market.

The "historic cultural artifact (was) confiscated at a Dutch art fair" in Maastricht in 2022, Schoof said, after someone anonymously tipped off the authorities about its illicit origin.

An investigation by Dutch police and the cultural heritage inspectorate confirmed that the sculpture had been plundered and unlawfully removed from Egypt. The dealer who had the piece voluntarily surrendered it following the inquiry.

The Dutch government said they expect to hand over the artefact to the Egyptian ambassador in the Netherlands by the end of this year, although no specific date has been set.—Reuters

Louvre heist suspects 'a couple with children'

PARIS: Small-time criminals are believed to be behind the spectacular jewel heist at the Louvre, the top Paris prosecutor said on Sunday, adding that two of the suspects are a couple with children.

Last month, a four-strong gang raided the Louvre, the world's most-visited art museum, in broad daylight, taking just seven minutes to steal jewellery worth an estimated $102 million before fleeing on scooters.

The thieves parked a truck with an extendable ladder below the museum's Apollo Gallery housing the French crown jewels, clambered up, broke a window and used angle grinders to cut into glass display booths containing the treasures.

Two men suspected of being the pair who broke into the gallery while their two accomplices waited outside have been detained, charged and remanded in custody.

Prosecutors said on Saturday that two more suspects — a man and a woman — had also been charged and remanded in custody. Authorities have so far not recovered the stolen jewels.

On Sunday, Paris prosecutor Laure Beccuau said that the suspects, who lived in the French capital's northern suburbs, were believed to be small-time criminals and not members of organised crime groups.

AN Oct 27 file photo shows police officers walk near the glass Pyramid of the Louvre Museum after law enforcement agencies arrested suspects in the heist case.—Reuters

Their profiles do not correspond to those "generally associated with the upper echelons of organised crime", Beccuau told France Info. At least one other person is still being sought, she added.

Beccuau said that the 37-year-old man and 38-year-old woman charged on Saturday were a couple and had children together. They have "denied any involvement", Beccuau said, adding that the man refused to make any statement.

'Local people'

The suspects are "clearly local people", she said. "They all lived more or less in Seine-Saint-Denis," the prosecutor said, referring to a region north of Paris. "Some are connected, particularly the couple," she said.

Two of the male suspects were convicted in a theft case together in 2015, she added.

The 37-year-old man has been charged with organised theft and criminal conspiracy, while his partner has been charged with complicity in organised theft and criminal conspiracy.

The woman was in tears as she appeared at a Paris court on Saturday, saying she feared for her children and for herself. The couple were arrested after their DNA was found in the basket lift used during the robbery.

"Significant" DNA evidence linking the man to the crime was found in the basket lift, the prosecutor said. Traces of his partner's DNA were also found, but they might have been transferred there through contact with a person or object, she added.—AFP